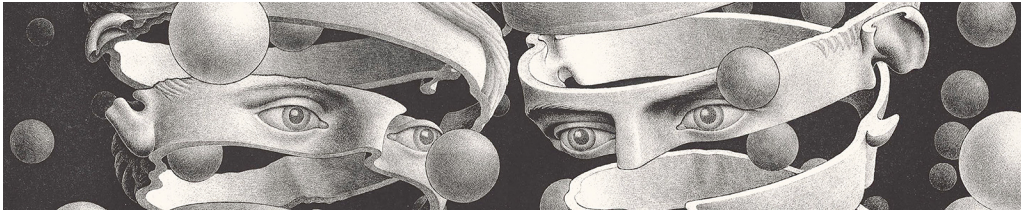


PHI 321: 20th Century Theories of Knowledge, Reality, and Meaning

Syracuse University, Spring 2025



Course Description

In the 20th century philosophy took a “linguistic turn,” as philosophers recognized that an understanding of the nature of language is key to many philosophical questions about reality and our knowledge of it. In this course we will investigate how theories in the philosophy of language and logic have been applied to questions about the nature of numbers, the structure of thought, fictional objects, our knowledge of the external world, ethical judgments, claims about necessity and possibility, and the relationship between the mind and the brain in the work of Frege, Russell, Ayer, and Kripke, among others.

Contact Information

Michael Rieppel

Email: morieppe@syr.edu

Office Hours: W 2:15–3:15 (523 Hall of Languages) or by appointment

Grades

- (i) Final Exam: 30%
- (ii) Midterm Exam: 30%
- (iii) Staged Writing Assignment: 20%
- (iv) Reading Assignments: 10%
- (v) Attendance and Participation: 10%

There won't be any extra credit. You also have the option of writing a term paper (5-6 pages) at the end of the semester in which you offer your own views on a topic discussed in this class. If you write a term paper, your final exam will be shorter, and your 30% final

exam grade will be based on whichever grade is higher, the shortened final exam or the term paper. You must notify me by **March 31st** if you decide to write a term paper.

Letter grades are based on the scale of A = 93+, A- = 90-92, B+ = 87-89, B = 83-86, B- = 80-82 etc.

Readings

The following is a tentative schedule, things might get added or removed as we go along. What we read when will depend on the pace at which we proceed, I will announce the reading assignments in class.

Week 1: *A priori* and *a posteriori* knowledge. Kant on the analytic/synthetic distinction.

Reading: Kant (1787), *Critique of Pure Reason*, Introduction Sec. IV-V.

Week 2: The opening to Frege's *Foundations of Arithmetic*.

Reading: Frege (1884), *The Foundations of Arithmetic*, Introduction and §1-7.

Week 3: Frege's criticism of opposing views on arithmetic.

Reading: *The Foundations of Arithmetic*, §8-14, §18, §21-28

Week 4: Frege's positive proposal about the nature of numbers and arithmetic.

Reading: *The Foundations of Arithmetic*, §45-48, §55-58, §62-63, §68, §72, §74-77

Week 5: Wrapping up *Foundations*. Russell's Paradox.

Week 6: Frege's sense/reference distinction.

Reading: Frege (1892) 'On Sense and Reference' (opening paragraphs)

Week 7: Frege on the sense and reference of sentences.

Reading: Frege (1892) 'On Sense and Reference'

Week 8: Russell's theory of propositions.

Reading: Russell (1903) *The Principles of Mathematics*, Ch. 4

Week 9: Russell's theory of descriptions.

Reading: Russell (1905) "On Denoting"

- Week 10:** Russell's arguments for his theory of descriptions.
Reading: Russell (1905) "On Denoting"
- Week 11:** Russell on sense data, acquaintance, and names.
Reading: Russell (1912) *The Problems of Philosophy*, Ch. 1, Ch. 5
- Week 12:** Russell on truth and falsehood. Ayer's Verification Principle.
Reading: Russell (1912) *The Problems of Philosophy*, Ch. 12
Ayer (1946) *Language, Truth and Logic*, Ch. 1
- Week 13:** Ayer's ethical emotivism.
Reading: Ayer (1946) *Language, Truth and Logic*, Ch. 6
- Week 14:** Kripke's arguments against descriptivism.
Reading: Kripke (1972) *Naming and Necessity*, Lecture I & II
- Week 15:** Marcus' Principle and Kripke on mind-brain identity.
Reading: Kripke (1972) *Naming and Necessity*, Lecture III

Course Policies

Academic Integrity

Don't cheat! Any established academic integrity violation may result in course failure, regardless of violation level. For details on SU's academic integrity expectations and policies visit:

<http://class.syr.edu/academic-integrity/policy/>

All the work that you submit *must have been written by you and reflect your own understanding of the material*. Using someone else's work without proper citation and attribution is considered a violation of academic integrity, as is the use of artificial intelligence to complete any assignment in this class. AI detection tools including Turnitin's built-in AI writing indicator may be used as one factor in evaluating potential inappropriate use of AI in this course.

Electronic Devices

Phones and computers should be put away during class and the volume muted. If you use a tablet to take notes *with a stylus by hand*, you may do so, but it must lay flat on the table and be used *for note-taking only*. If a device becomes a distraction to you or those around you, you won't be allowed to use it anymore.

Extensions and Absences

To request an extension on an assignment you need to contact me *at least two days* before the due date. Unexcused late work will not be accepted.

You get three unexcused absences without it affecting your grade, additional absences should come with an official excuse (e.g. a doctor's note). If you expect to miss a class meeting due to a religious observance, please inform me of the dates on which you will be absent within the first two weeks of the semester. You will be marked absent on a given day if you arrive late, sleep, email, surf the web, or engage in other distracting activity.

Email Policy

I will do my best to reply to emails about brief administrative questions within a day (on weekdays). For substantive inquiries, please come see me during office hours or schedule an appointment.

Health

Mental health and overall well-being have a significant impact on academic success. It is important to develop skills and resources to effectively navigate stress, anxiety, depression and other mental health concerns. Please familiarize yourself with the range of resources the [Barnes Center](#) provides and seek out support for mental health concerns as needed. Counseling services are available 24/7, 365 days a year, at 315.443.8000, and I encourage you to explore the resources available through the [Wellness Leadership Institute](#).

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Syracuse University values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to a climate of mutual respect and full participation. There may be aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your inclusion and full participation in this course. I invite any student to contact me to discuss strategies and/or accommodations (academic adjustments) that may be essential to your success and to collaborate with the [Center for Disability Resources \(CDR\)](#) in this process. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact the CDR as soon as possible.